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Williamsburg, Virginia

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**Using Political Cartoons in the Classroom**

This month's [Image of the Month](http://www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/volume3/october04/iotm.cfm) is a political print. Political cartoons, as they came to be known in the mid-nineteenth century, are one of the most widely used forms of propaganda during wartime. They provide political and social commentary, often using caricature or distortion to make a point. Students respond to the humor, and analysis of cartoons provides opportunities for discussion and writing activities. Here are some tips for using political cartoons:

* Discuss satire and what makes a political cartoon different from the "funnies" in the newspaper.
* To find political cartoons that are primary sources from the period of history you're teaching, try visiting web sites like the Library of Congress' [American Memory Collection](http://memory.loc.gov/) or their [Prints & Photographs Reading Room](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html).
* To find current political cartoons, watch the local newspaper and/or weekly news magazines. [*Time for Kids*](http://www.timeforkids.com/TFK/) has a weekly political cartoon appropriate for children. Also try [Daryl Cagle's Professional Cartoonists Index](http://cagle.slate.msn.com/).
* Ask students to bring in political cartoons they find and display them on a bulletin board. Let each student lead a discussion on the meaning of the cartoon they chose.
* Have students look at a political cartoon carefully for a full minute before beginning discussion. Encourage students to notice every detail in the people, objects, and action.
* Try to secure several political cartoons of the same event so that you can divide the class into small groups for analysis. Then let each group present their cartoon with an explanation.
* Have students create their own political cartoons of events from the period of history you're studying. Make sure that they understand that the cartoon must represent a viewpoint.

**Questions for Discussion**

* Describe the mood of the cartoon.
* What techniques or devices does the artist use? Caricature? Symbolism? Ridicule? Puns?
* What issue or event does the cartoon deal with?
* Describe the action that is taking place.
* What is the purpose of the cartoon? What is its message? Is it effective?
* Who is the intended audience?
* Whose viewpoint does it represent?
* What groups wold agree/disagree with the cartoon's message? Why?

This lesson was written by Beth Burney, elementary school teacher, Atlanta, GA.

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